

MBC Housing Management Policies

Timetable	
Meeting	Date
Housing, Health & Environment PAC	7 TH September 2023
Cabinet Member for Housing & Health	29 September 2023

Will this be a Key Decision?	No
Urgency	Not Applicable
Final Decision-Maker	CABINET MEMBER FOR HOUSING & HEALTH
Lead Head of Service	William Cornall Director of Regeneration & Place
Lead Officer and Report Author	John Littlemore Head of Housing & Regulatory Services
Classification	Public
Wards affected	All Wards

Executive Summary

In order to comply with best practice and the developing Social Housing Standards, the Council must develop a suite of housing management policies to support the management of its new affordable housing stock. Advice was taken on what documents are required and the policies attached to this report represent those policies in the first tranche of a suite of documents that are required first.

Purpose of Report

Cabinet Member Decision

This report makes the following recommendation to the Cabinet Member for Housing and Health:

1. That the suite of Housing Management Documents attached in the appendices to the report are approved.

MBC Housing Management Policies

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Impact on Corporate Priorities	<p>The four Strategic Plan objectives are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embracing Growth and Enabling Infrastructure • Safe, Clean and Green • Homes and Communities • A Thriving Place <p>• Accepting the recommendations will materially improve the Council's ability to achieve its ambitions around the providing 1,000 new affordable homes.</p>	Head of Housing & Regulatory Services
Cross Cutting Objectives	<p>The four cross-cutting objectives are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heritage is Respected • Health Inequalities are Addressed and Reduced • Deprivation and Social Mobility is Improved • Biodiversity and Environmental Sustainability is respected <p>The report recommendation supports the achievement of reducing deprivation and improving social mobility.</p>	Head of Housing & Regulatory Services
Risk Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The risks are covered in the relevant risk section of the report. 	Head of Housing & Regulatory Services
Financial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The proposals set out in the recommendation are all within already approved budgetary headings and so need no new funding for implementation. 	Head of Housing & Regulatory Services
Staffing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will deliver the recommendations with our current staffing. 	Head of Housing &

		Regulatory Services
Legal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accepting the recommendations will fulfil the Council's duties under Social Housing Regulation Act. 	Head of Housing & Regulatory Services
Privacy and Data Protection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accepting the recommendations will increase the volume of data held by the Council. We will hold that data in line with our retention schedules. 	Head of Housing & Regulatory Services
Equalities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We recognise the recommendations may have varying impacts on different communities within Maidstone. Therefore a separate equalities impact assessment will be completed. 	Head of Housing & Regulatory Services
Public Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We recognise that the recommendations will have a positive impact on population health or that of individuals. We recognise that the recommendations will not negatively impact on population health or that of individuals. We recognise the recommendations may have varying impacts on the health of the population or individuals within Maidstone. Therefore we have completed a separate health impact assessment. In accepting the recommendations the Council would be fulfilling the requirements of the Health Inequalities Plan 	[Public Health Officer]
Crime and Disorder	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There are no implications to Crime and Disorder 	Head of Housing & Regulatory Services
Procurement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There are no procurement implications in this report. 	Head of Housing & Regulatory Services
Biodiversity and Climate Change	The implications of this report on biodiversity and climate change have been considered and are;	Head of Housing & Regulatory Services

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This aligns with actions of the Biodiversity and Climate Change Action Plan 	
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2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The regulatory framework for social housing that was in place when the Council transferred its housing stock in 2004 has changed significantly. Following the decision by the Council to acquire and manage 1,000 new affordable homes, advice was taken from a specialist housing law firm on the type of tenancy to be issued and what other policy documents would be required.
- 2.2 The Council is a Registered Provider of Social Housing for both development and management purposes. As such, the Council is subject to the Regulator of Social Housing, which according to its website 'promotes a viable, efficient and well-governed social housing sector able to deliver and maintain homes of appropriate quality that meet a range of needs.'
- 2.3 With the assistance of the Council's Research & Policy Officer, the Head of Housing & Regulatory Services identified that circa fifteen separate documents would be required. Some policy documents would be more urgent to adopt than others, as certain policies such as the tenant consultation guide are best suited to when the Council has acquired the right quantum of properties.
- 2.4 The first tranche of seven documents are attached to this report and represent those policies are needed soonest in order to provide excellent management services. Some of the policy documents are aimed at informing our tenants, others are marked as officer documents to guide staff in their decision-making, whilst the remainder apply to both staff and tenants.
- 2.5 Much of the content of these policies is governed either by legislation or regulation. However, the tone and style of the documents is a matter that Members may want to comment on.
- 2.6 The first set of policy documents includes:
- o The Tenants' Handbook
 - o Tenancy Management Policy
 - o Succession Policy
 - o Pet Policy
 - o Anti-Social Behaviour Policy
 - o Rent Arrears and Income Policy
 - o Mutual Exchange Policy

2.7 The second set of policy documents will cover:

- Compensation Policy
- Complaints & Dispute Resolution Policy
- Damp & Mould Rectification Policy
- Recharge Policy
- Repairs & Maintenance Handbook
- Right to Buy Guide
- Tenancy Fraud Policy

2.8 The Tenants' Handbook is a useful guide intended for all tenants that will be given at the time of the sign up. The remaining documents will be made available to tenants through our website. A dedicated area on our website is being developed for tenants to be able to log onto to view their rent accounts, report repairs and other matters, and have access to the policy documents.

2.9 The Tenancy Management Policy provides an overview of the range of policies that contain more detailed information about each topic.

2.10 The content of the policy documents has been developed to reflect the current statutory and regulatory framework, and to take account of emerging legislation and reform such as Social Housing Regulation Act.

2.11 The Communications Team has assisted the Housing Service in developing an in-house style for the policy documents that reflects our ambition to have a professional and accessible service to our tenants.

2.12 The Housing, Health and Environment Policy Advisory Committee considered the matter on 7 September 2023 and recommended that the recommendation be approved.

3. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

3.1 The Council could choose to not have a suite of housing management policies but this is strongly not recommended, as this would leave the Council open to criticism and possible censure by the Regulator of Social Housing and the Housing Ombudsman.

3.2 The Council has an ambition to provide high quality homes and excellent housing management services. This will be best served by having a broad suite of policy documents to assist staff and tenants to understand their respective roles and responsibilities.

4. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 The preferred options is set out in paragraph 3.2 above for the reasons stated. This will enable the Council to have a Housing Management service that is compliant with the raft of regulation and statutory requirements that govern Registered Providers of Social Housing.

5. RISK

5.1 As stated above, were the Council not to adopt the proposed suite of housing management policies it would run the real risk of not being compliant with its regulatory duties. A lack of clear policies would also leave the Council open to legal challenge on important decision making, such as granting succession to a relative of a deceased tenant, or when ending the tenancy under one of the Grounds for Possession.

6. REPORT APPENDICES

The following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report:

- Appendix 1: Suite of Housing Management Policies
 - The Tenants' Handbook
 - Tenancy Management Policy
 - Succession Policy
 - Pet Policy
 - Anti-Social Behaviour Policy
 - Rent Arrears and Income Policy
 - Mutual Exchange Policy
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